DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 330 970 CG 023 313

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TITLE Occupational Choices of Children: Must They Be Traditional?
PUB DATE Jan 91
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the Annual National Consultation on Vocational Counselling (17th, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, January 22-24, 1991).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Career Choice; Elementary Education; Elementary School Students; Foreign Countries; Occupational Aspiration; School Counselors; *Sex Stereotypes
IDENTIFIERS Canada

ABSTRACT

Most research indicates that the stereotyping of career roles still occurs among children and youth, and this form of stereotyping has a significant influence on career choice and vocational aspirations. Three factors which seem to keep girls from pursuing non-traditional occupations include gender-role socialization, poor self-efficacy, and negative attitudes held by both girls and women. The focus of career decisions made during the early school years is based on the use of fantasy. During the fantasy period, and beyond, imagery and daydreams may be a viable vehicle to counter the effects of the the factors which influence gender-role stereotyping. The preferred approach for school counselors to reach children and youth has always been primary prevention. The vehicle utilized in a primary prevention program is usually the same as that found in most good classrooms; the counselor emphasizes group dynamics in assisting the class-sized group to realize new attitudes about gender roles. Counselors can assist children either directly or indirectly with the assistance of classroom teachers to develop new and exciting views of their place in a society devoid of gender-role stereotyping. As children come to learn that work can become an integral part of a healthy, productive lifestyle rather than a life sentence, they will find much more meaning to planning for their place in society. (LLL)

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# Occupational Choices of Children: Must They Be Traditional?

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Running Head: Occupational Choices

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Occupational Choices of Children: Must They Be Traditional?

Abstract

Based on the holistic concepts of a wellness model, this paper describes an approach designed to facilitate a healthy flexing of career choice in an effort to overturn the continuing negative effects on people which occur when, as children, they are allowed to view the world of work from a traditional gender-role perspective.

Occupational Choices of Children: Must They be Traditional?

It appears that the focus of professional counselling practice in the nineties is now solidly fixed on the concept of wellness. Both the Canadian Guidance and Counselling Association (CGCA) and the American Association for Counselling and Development (AACD) have recently used the notion of wellness as their national conference themes. The primary precept for this preventive approach to living is quite simple: wellness is a state of health which can be achieved through the balance and integration of several dimensions of a person's life -- the body, mind, spirit, emotions, ambitions, and relationships (Avasthi, 1990). William Hettler of the National Wellness Institute at Stevens Point, Wisconsin, has recently created a model to highlight his conception of these six components in life: the physical, spiritual, emotional, occupational, intellectual, and social. According to Avasthi, it is Hettler's belief that in order for a person to develop a sense of happiness, success, and stability, each component must be addressed, and there must be some overlap of the components in order for the individual to develop a strong sense of balance and integration. Instead of dealing with a person's life in segments as was the rule when I was "made" a counsellor, counsellors are now being urged to concentrate on how each thread makes up the whole tapestry.

This last idea may require some clarification. Although the focus of this paper is on the occupational or career dimen- sion of wellness, it would seem that the choice of occupation, worker satisfacion, career ambitions and school performance are all

important facets of healthy self-esteem (which might be considered as one aspect of the intellectual dimension). Often people require assistance in their quest to decipher the impact of their options, talents, ambitions, and the conflicting feelings they have surrounding these issues, not only because of their own well-being, but also because of the effect of their decisions on the various other dimensions of their lives.

The Case of Brian

An example may serve to illustrate this problem! Brian is a line-cook in a local roadhouse. He truly likes his job and has been told by the kitchen manager that he is doing well. In the near future Brian hopes to be promoted to a supervisory position and does his best so that he might realize a speedy promotion. The only roadblock to a promotion at this time is the lack of opportunity for management to provide the additional training required to expand Brian's level and range of skills as a cook; he brought management and supervisory experience with him when he was originally hired for the job.

At the present time Brian is working anywhere from 24 to 44 hours a week on the line. As is the norm in the industry, these hours are distributed over a seven-day week, and on many of these days he has split shifts. For instance, he worked each and every day of the last 18 days. Last week he had five spilt shifts, and worked five consectutive night shifts to boot. The resultant impact on his physical well-being is well defined: he does not get enough proper exercise and fresh air, it is difficult at best for

him to rest and relax between split shifts, and he has some difficulty developing a healthy and nutritious routine for eating. Further, it is not unusual for Brian to work unti 2:00 a.m. and he has fallen into the habit of reading or watching late-night movies in his endeavour to relax before going to sleep. The result of this kind of timetable is that Brian does not have much hope of developing what has traditionally been viewed as a reasonably normal lifestyle. In addition to this he most often does not get a chance to dine with the rest of the family; as a result he either eats alone when his schedule requires him to be at work during normal family meal times, or else he might be able to catch a meal with one of his parents. Since beginning this job some six months ago, his family life has been thrown into a turmoil and he labels the quality of his time with his parents, both collectively and individually, unaccep-table. To make matters worse, it is difficult for someone with these hours to develop any kind of meaningful relationships outside the workplace, and so Brian's social life is poor. To compound this dilemma, there are some people in his life who do not believe that being a cook is very prestigous or for that matter an appropriate occupation for a young man (it is one thing to manage a roadhouse; it is something else for a man to spend his life as "just a line-cook"), and pressure is brought to bear on Brian to leave the job and continue his education, preferably at the university level so that he can do

something better with his life -- something with a future; something that was daytime Monday to Friday; something with good pay and benefits.

It is worth noting here that Brian discussed the position described above with family and friends prior to accepting the job. It is quite possible that his employer misled him about the hours and lack of staff available to provide the kind of training necessary for him to advance to a supervisory level in this national company. At the same time, however, Brian had no real concept of the demands placed on a worker in this field and no reason to develop a vision of himself on a road to nowhere.

It follows that at the age of 21 Brian has some confusing and conflicting thoughts to sort out and at the moment his self-esteem is poor. According to Fitts (1971), one internal dimension of the self concept is identity, and Brian must determine who he is and what his role in life should be at this time. A second internal dimension of self concept is behaviour, and Brian must determine what it is that he wishes to do with his 24 hours a day, seven days a week. And finally, and probably most importantly, the third internal dimension of self concept is self-acceptance and Brian must come to grips with how he feels about his identity and his behaviour. This is no mean feat since Brian's value system is such that he prizes family life and does not want to hurt those who really do care about him; similarly, he has a good work ethic and wants to develop a good work history!

Thus it is that the various dimensions of the wellness model come into play. One component of a person's life cannot be explored without somehow considering its impact on the other five dimensions.

## Traditional Occupational Choices

A review of the professional literature covering the last quarter of a century (Bailey and Nihlen, 1989) showed most research indicates that the stereotyping of career roles still occurs among children and youth and this form of stereotyping has a significant influence on career choice and vocational aspirations. Their findings were supported for the most part by studies at Windsor by Awender and Wearne (1991). Basically, the latter studies indicate that the occupational choices made by young females are changing; the primary focus is on a career outside the home. The nature of these occupational choices, however, still tends to reflect those which have traditionally been considered to be dominated by females. The males' occupational choices do not reflect any drastic change from the traditional view.

There may be a number of explanations why young people continue to choose occupations from a traditional gender-role perspective. Haring and Beyard-Tyler (1984) posited three factors which seem to keep girls from pursuing non-traditional occupations:

1. gender-role socialization,
2. poor self-efficacy, and
3. negative attitudes held by both girls and women.

It would be rather simple to extend these factors to describe many boys and men given the nature of peer pressure in the schools.

It would seem naive to even suggest here that there is a reasonable approach to eliminating this continuing problem. In fact, there are probably a good many people who rather prefer that men and women "learn their place" in society and maintain the status quo. But that is not in keeping with societal demands in the ninetees, and ways must be found to advance equality in the workforce of this country.

Indeed, the first of the 15 principles of guidance and counselling posited by Cribbin (1951) following his review of the professional books on guidance published between 1935 and 1950 stated that "people have dignity and integrity and a right to assistance in time of need". Granted, there are among us those who do not believe in the dignity and integrity of all people, and it is of little personal consequence for them to continue to violate the rights of others. But at this time in human development society as a whole is taking a concerted action against such prejudice. It seems to me that a proactive, appropriately timed approach to prevention of unacceptable belief systems is also required if society is to overturn traditional gender-role socialization.

It remains the position of the developmentalists, notably Ginzberg (1971) and Super (1969), that the focus of career decisions made during the early school years is based on the use of fantasy. Due to the fair amount of time many young children spend

fantasizing through games and the media of television it would seem likely that many exiting visions and daydreams are conjured up by the very young (and, I suppose, the very young at heart as well). Thus it is reasonable to suggest that during the fantasy period -- and beyond -- imagery and daydreams are a viable vehicle to counter the effects of the factors indicated above which influence gender-role stereotyping.

If something is to be done at this time to eliminate the development of gender-role stereotyping, then professional practice will be governed by several facors: when the practice will be introduced developmentally; how esteem issues such as identity, behaviour, and satisfaction will be addressed; and how socialization will take place.

## Selecting An Intervention

The preferred approach for school counsellors to reach children and youth has always been primary prevention, possibly due to the fact that most school counsellors are first, and foremost, school teachers with a history of effective teaching. It is only natural that they utilize this experience in their guidance program through an educative or training role. More-over, this approach has been given a much higher profile in recent years as evidenced by the special issues of The School Counselor in September 1989, and the Elementary School Guidance and Counseling in October 1989. Since the emphasis of a specialist-preventive program is on

attitude change (Shaw, 1973), it would seem reasonable that this approach is appropriate for the topic under consideration in this paper.

The vehicle utilized in a primary prevention program is usually the same as is found in most good classrooms; the counsellor emphasizes group dynamics in assisting the class-sized group to realize new attitudes about gender roles.

## Setting the Stage

I recently had an opportunity to watch Stephanie Newis, one of my student teachers give a grade five class a lesson on the newspaper. Basically, Stephanie had asked her class to peruse the newspaper for items of interest, and each pupil was to be on the lookout for nine items as part of a scavenger hunt, the first of which was an article on a famous person. Having read the article, a pupil would then summarize the information and if a picture was available, to use it to develop and decorate a personal journal.

I was seated at the back of the room and watched as a lad named Tim read a rather lengthy article about Bob Probert, a local hockey player with the Detroit Red Wings. This provided an opportunity to discuss career education with the four children at the table, and I chatted with Tim about his thoughts on hockey in general, and Mr. Probert in particular. By having Tim fantasize about himself as hockey player I was able to have him explore a number of dimensions in the wellness model and then went on to have him replace himself as the athlete by visualizing each of the other three people in his learning group. Thus Tim was able to picture

both male and female friends as hockey players and the result was a discussion of gender-free work and play roles and lifestyles with the four children in the learning group. Obviously, it would have been just as easy to pick on any of the seven learning groups in the class and Stephanie thought she could follow through with each of the other groups as she stopped to observe their work. If this approach is utilized on a number of occasions, it would seem to me that the children will become accustomed to viewing themselves in a variety of worker roles and realize that there are many possible ways of placing people in the workforce, regardless of race, colour, creed, or gender.

A Next Step

Once each of the children in each of the groups in this class has had an opportunity to practice using fantasy as a way of exploring the appropriateness of gender-free role playing, it is reasonable to introduce the topic to the class as a whole. In the case of the lesson based on reading the newspaper, any of the class members could be asked to summarize an article of interest and to then fantasize any number of things about taking on the role in question. As others in the class personalize the fantasy, many possible scenarios could be presented, leading the children to explore their place in a healthy society. It is important here to note the impact of peer pressure. At this age, there is a great potential for the peer group to provide prosocial influence (Clasen and Brown, 1985).

## Conclusion

It is my belief that counsellors can assist children either directly or indirectly with the assistance of classroom teachers to develop new and exciting views of their place in a society void of gender-role stereotyping. Moreover, as children come to learn that work can become an integral part of a healthy, productive lifestyle rather than a life sentence, they will find much more meaning to planning for their place in society.

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